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ABSTRACT

The development of social science terminology about ethnicity in the United States is traced from colonial times to the present, and conflict among ethnic groups is examined in relation to contemporary problems in the suburbs of New York. Early in U.S. history, immigrating ethnic groups were thought to contribute to the melting pot character of the country. At first, the melting pot concept emphasized conformity to the Anglocentric ways of the colonial settlers; later, it emphasized interaction among native and new groups as resulting in a unique combination with its own characteristics. Still another conceptualization of the melting pot was that ethnic groups continue to retain certain unique mannerisms while at the same time adapting somewhat to American social styles. This conception was the beginning of the theory of cultural pluralism, which by the early 1970s began to replace the melting pot theory. One phenomenon of ethnic immigration was the conflict which resulted between natives and immigrants. Because immigrants were willing to work hard for low wages, they took jobs away from some natives. This situation created bitterness and some violence on the part of natives. Ironically, as the immigrant groups were assimilated into American society, they themselves displayed enmity toward even newer ethnic immigrants who threatened their job security. Segregation and ethnocentrism among ethnic groups are evident today in the suburbs of New York. Mutual respect among ethnic groups will need to be developed there. (AV)

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# Societal Ramifications of Ethnicity in the Suburbs

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I.

Facts rarely speack for themselves. The demographic statistics just presented by Dr. Cavaioli are fascinating. Many interesting and important relationships can be drawn from them; but the question remains: what do they mean? Those of us who heard or have read the facts presented in the previous paper interpret them according to our own wits, and our own perspectives, and our own wishes, in spite of the fact that we like to think that scientists are purely objective. With this in mind, I should like to prefix my remarks first of all with the caution that they consist of my interpretation of ethnicity in suburbia based upon my own theoretical explanation of ethnic dynamics which I will present briefly. Secondly, I should like to invite you to join with me in talking about ethnicity this way. That is to say, let us think of this not so much as a lecture, but more as a few remarks to serve as a springborad for discussion and conversation so that we can raise new questions for research in suburbia.

To begin, any interpretation of the persistence of ethnicity in the suburban regions must be culled out of two major sources -

1) - the history of the American assimilation ideologies; and

2) - the nature of ethnicity itself as a function of human personality.

The latter I have dealt with extensively elsewhere and will now say only that: a) ethnicity is a central aspect of ego-identity. b) As such, individuals may choose to ignore and forget their heritage for social or economic reasons and/or in response to the press of the schools, but they can not eradicate it from their basic personalities.

II.

Assimilation, that is, the term "assimilation" was used in different ways; but in the United States, from the earliest days of

the nation, it referred to the cultural "melting down" of different kinds of peoples into either 1) Anglo-Americans, or 2) some totally new "race." The first mode of melting we call "Anglo-conformity" or Melting Pot I, wherein the English settlers of the 17th century dominated all others and succeeded in establishing their ways as the norm for all. By the time of the colonial period, Anglo cultural forms dominated. Newcomers were expected to conform to this mode. This process may be schematized as: A↔B.A; where A represents the host population; the double arrow represents the interaction that takes place; and B represents the new immigrant group.

This differs from the second mode of cultural melting down which I have called Melting Pot II. This is the mode that is usually called the "melting pot" notion, and it refers to the ideas that the United States is thought of as a "seething cauldron" wherein God melts and fuses all the races of mankind into a new unity. Schematically, this may be represented as A↔B=C. I shall return to these ideas on the cultural assimilation ("melting-down") in a moment, but let us now see how this relates to and influences our interpretations of ethnicity in the suburbs. Writers like MacKenzie, Bogardus, Miller and others, constituting the so called Chicago school of urbanologists, following their colleague and mentor, Robert E. Park, in the period just before and after World War I, saw assimilation as a resultant of <u>interaction</u> among people, particularly in what Park called the world of the "market-place." There, people engaged in the social processes of cooperation, competition and conflict for reasons of economic survival and advance.

This position was analogously pre-stated decades earlier by a person well known to you historians, Frederick Jackson Turner, who also saw cultural homogeneity coming about as a result of <u>interaction</u>

among people. For him the environment was not the market-place, but "the frontier." Cooperation was the major process entered into. Mutual engagement and dependence was needed for basic survival and growth.

But if the frontier, and later the market-place, were insufficient forces for successfully engendering total assimilation, certainly, it was thought, the experience of people during World War II and immediately after would ensure the final dissolution of all cultural differences.

What were these experiences? First, extrapolating from Dr. Cavaioli's statistics, yound 2nd and 3rd generation men (and also women) left the familiar surroundings of home, the origin of their personal ethnicity and they went away from wider enclaves of strong ethnicity, the immigrant ethnic communities, to a new life in the armed services of our nation. Although only temporary, for some this meant periods upwards of 5 years or more and even longer for those men who prior to that had served in what was called the CCC., the Civilian Conservation Corps, or had been conscripted, that is, drafted into the peacetime army of preparedness. Presumably these men and women had learned in the services, to live with people of different social backgrounds, of different economic backgrounds, of different political backgrounds, of different religious backgrounds, of different regional backgrounds, i.e. people from New York City and people from the farms of Montana, of different racial and ethnic backgrounds.

Here, for sure at least were people who, having left the bosoms of their families, had learned to share a new, commonly accepted, truly "American" way of life, i.e. a truly new "American" way of

eating and recreating, of showering and shaving, of working and risking, of cowardice and heroism, of learning and forgetting, of cooperation and competition for the sake of surviving the larger conflict. Here, for sure, were people who in the post World War II period would join in a trek from New York City, especially from the neighborhoods in Brooklyn and in Queens eastward to Long Island, people who, in this new suburban environment, would assimilate with each other and generate cultural homogeneity.

Indeed, the ethnic picture of the suburbs drawn in the 1950's was one of melting pot assimilation. City people in the country, sharing a new life of green lawns, and commutation to work, and wives chauffering children, and middle class life styles and politicking for better schools and lower taxes, all these brought people together into what was supposed to be the true American way of life. But by the end of that decade and in the early 1960's, insightful observers were already recognizing the fallacies in that picture. The classical writers on suburban life like Bennet Berger and Herbert Gans among others began to describe both in the scientific journals and in popular literature a new cultural heterogeneity. They described the exclusion of certain groups from the suburbs, they described the voluntary segregation that was taking place, and later these descriptions began to reveal the suburban trek of formerly excluded persons, especially Afro-Americans but including also large numbers of Puerto Ricans.

Their descriptions revealed the continuing interaction of different peoples cooperating and competing between and among themselves. Their writings revealed what having ethnicity in suburbia means, namely that we cannot be deluded, or bullied, into thinking that painful intergroup processes like competition and especially conflict

will disappear as a result of the homogenizing of peoples because first of all, it is now fully obvious that we are not homogenized at all. What's happening is that we are "emerging integrated." Secondly, the basis for the conflict was never really ethnic at all - it was economic. Leaving this second notion for later in the paper, I would like to take a few moments to explicate the first notion.

III.

I want to go back for just a moment and reiterate what I said earlier with respect to the notion of "melting" and the scheme A↔B=A. With every migration of large numbers of people to the United States, those citizens inhabiting the place at the time of the migration (A), interacted (double arrow) with the newcomers (B). It would be easy to imagine the large variety of interactions that could take place, the sorts of adjustive reactions hosts and migrants would make, and the plethora of potential cultural outcomes. In the early days of the nation, there appears to have been a conviction that an intermixing of different peoples would occur. Crevecoeur asserted in 1782 that in the United States, "Here, individuals of all nations are melted into a new race of men..." But, in fact, what happened was that one group dominated all others and what emerged was the rural, Protestant, Anglo-American model, which, for a century and a half served as a paradigm for new arrivals. Through the 19th Century, this was the organizing ideology and expectation, and few failed to be influenced by it.

But even from the earliest settlements, not everyone fully mirrored the model. The autochthonous peoples of this land and the Africans and Asians were most obviously and visibly set apart. As

new immigrants came to these shores and across these borders, they did not melt so completely. Irish and Germans and others were holding tenaciously to aspects of their culture which distinghished them from the dominant Anglo majority.

During this period finding themselves in the midst of many different kinds of peoples, most of them poor and willing to work harder for less, the Americans whose ancestors had come earlier began to develop the Know Nothing movements and other Nativist, "America for the Americans" movements. On the other hand, they also produced Emerson and Whitman, intellectual opposites of these movements.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Israel Zangwill, one of those who wasn't melting, wrote his play "The Melting Pot", where in he also described a process of unification, and he presented an image of what was to result - A↔B=C - a new American race. This we refer to as Melting Pot II. Together these two melting pot notions were the competing ideologies of United States assimilation. Both asserted the primacy of unification and fusion through cultural melting. They differed not in the process they described, the interaction of host and immigrant, nor in the final goal and purpose of that process, the unity of the nation, but rather, they differed in their image of the product. The controversy prior to and culminating in the first Quota Act of 1921 centered around the question of whether the American "race" was to continue to change with each new great immigration or whether the American character, distinctly Anglo, white and Protestant, was set at the time of the founding of the nation.

Adding to the complexity of the problem was a third notion, thought by its advocates to be more in keeping with democratic ideals.

Introduced by John Dewey, and developed and advocated by Horace Kallen, Isaac Berkson and Julius Dracksler, "cultural pluralism" was offered as an alternative to the melting pot ideas. It was based upon observations that within the structure of American society, many individuals continued to maintain behavioral mannerisms and group contacts, which distinguished them from their Anglo fellow-citizens. This was true of the recently arrived aroups of immigrants, but more importantly it was true also of many whose families had arrived among the earliest settlers of the 17th century. America, from this perspective, was seen as a federation of unassimilated cultural groups, a "Nation of nations", the epitome of a cultural democracy. A↔B=A+B. By this notion, the autochthonous peoples, the Africans and the Asians could also be seen as people that could be united in this society.

Cultural Pluralism, as an explanatory description of American society was not accepted by social scientists until the late 1940's. Linked to the Black revolution of the 1960's it began to acquire a general acceptance. Further impetus was given by the white ethnic movements of the time, by the press of Hispanics, Asians and native Americans and by the advocates of bilingual and multi-cultural education. By the early 1970's "cultural pluralism" was replacing the "melting pot" as an American ideology.

IV.

Even before this ideological evolution from melting pot to cultural pluralism took place, social scientists were already refining their notions about assimilation in the United States. Gans, Glazer and Moynihan, Fitzpatrick, Schermerhorn and others were observing in the 1950's the truth of each of the earlier ideas. Moving aside from

from the ideological content and viewing particularly the explanatory content, they saw that. in fact, newcomers do in a very short time begin to conform to certain aspects of Anglo-American culture. Most obviously, they learn to speak the English language. (A↔B=A). Beyond that they, in time, learn American behavioral mannerisms, so many of which are adapted from the English. But it was also observed that Americans possessed many ethnic identities. They observed the continuity of different cultural forms and behaviors that exist in this country (A↔B=A+B). And finally, they observed that even while retaining our original cultural heritage, if any of us go back to the land of our forefathers we are easily identified as "Americans." That is to say, we are indeed a new cultural group (A↔B=C).

These observations led to the belief that a new notion had to be added to the earlier ones. The United States had been described not as a melting pot or a pluralistic mosaic but rather as an "emerging culture." With every new wave of immigrants coming to these shores in numbers beyond the "population threshhold ratio." The culture of the United States emerges a little different; its values are altered; its norms are transformed (however slightly); the American way of life is in some way modified. As we shall see, cultural mutations occur as a result of the structural adjustments that take place. The picture presented is a dynamic United States, constantly in flux, evolving anew with each new great immigration. Using the same symbols that we've been using, this process may be represented as A↔B=AB, where AB stands for a cultural form that is neither A nor B, but is a new form combining A and B in a dynamic relationship.

This last seemed at the time to be the best description of the

interrelationship of immigrants and American culture. Various explanations for its occurance have been offered, most of which spring from structural-functional or equilibrium perspectives. For the most part they have given expression to what have been called "straight - line" theories of assimilation, i.e., within two or three of four generations of the arrival of the immigrants into this country, their offspring lose all foreigness and separateness and become totally assimilated into this society.

The "emerging culture" A↔B=AB description however forces reconsideration of this "straight line" idea, since, at least implicitly, it characterizes the assimilation as a "two way" process wherein, not only does the immigrant change, but the American culture changes as well. By addressing the issue from a conflict rather than an equilibrium perspective, a new theoretical explanation may be generated.

Continuing in the tradition of Park and the urban ecologists, we observe the interaction (↔) between the native resident Americans (A) and the newcomers (B). It is important to ask what alternative behaviors are open to the native residents in the face of a large influx of newcomers. A simple typology of the continuum of alternatives would include the following behaviors extending from highly positive to highly negative:

1. Acceptance: behavior ranging from actual welcome to tolerance and accommodation
2. Indifference: the host response ranges from simple to lack of concern to disregard and neglect
3. Rejection: ranging from abuse and exploitation to exclusion, deportation and even murder.

Actually, native residents opted for all three of these alternatives at one time or another. But most importantly, insult,

exploitation and gross mistreatment were the institutional behaviors that significantly altered the lives of both the immigrants and the native residents. In spite of conflicting differences, the incorporation of the newcomers into American society and culture might have occurred, as Turner predicted, through the process of cooperation. Or they might have been incorporated, as Park pointed out, through the process of competition as happens in the market-place. In point of fact, however, the process of conflict seems to have been the major social process operating in the incorporation of the newcomers to this country. This is amply documented in the historic accounts of prejudice, discrimination and violence that every immigrant group (although not every individual immigrant) and their progeny experienced in this country.

V.

At the risk of being repetitive, to understand the dynamics of the unification of the peoples of the United States with each other, a conflict perspective must be utilized. One conflict model that may be relevant is the "dialectic;" and the host society-immigrant interrelationships may be described in dialectical terms. This is what has been done in the "impact-integration" theory of the relationships of immigrant adjustment and American culture. "Impact-integration" serves as an explanation of the "emerging culture" description. The native residents (A) interact ($\longleftrightarrow$) with the immigrants (B). The host society is intensely negative, reacting with territorial defensiveness to the perceived economic threat that the immigrants present. Native residents reject the newcomers, denigrating, exploiting and abusing them in other ways. The total behavior of the native residents engenders their

dialectical opposite - "estranged intruders."

What this means is that the newcomers, by the treatment accorded them were made to feel as though they were unwelcome creatures, thrust into the midst of this society without reason or permission. Far from being invited guests they were made to feel that they were trespassing strangers - alien beings with curious and unusual manners, customs and backgrounds, morally and intellectually inferior, bad for the nation - who clearly were unwanted and did not belong here. That is what an "estranged intruder" is.

The newcomers, for their part, may not have expected to be treated with open arms, but neither did they expect to be treated so badly. True, they migrated for self-interests, but it is also true that they were invited. Africans were captured, dragged here and enslaved, as we know. Others, starting as indentured servants were brought here to work and some of them were enslaved, too. For the most part, immigrants, fleeing persecution or poverty in their homelands looked forward to a life of freedom for their children and grandchildren which they hoped to ransom by their labors. The wealthy railroad owners, land owners, mine owners, factory owners, mill owners, etc. wanted immigrant labor which was cheaper than native labor and often was more productive. The rejection that the newcomers experienced, therefore, was confusing to them, and further alienated them.

The negativism of the host society often precipitated the very behavior being criticized. Newcomers remained close to one another for mutual defense and succour. Feeling left out, they worked hard at their employment and sought to emulate the financial successes of the native residents thinking thereby to be accepted. But working hard for less money was itself the cause of their being rejected by those whose

jobs they were taking, or rather, being given.

The newcomers had put up a lot to emigrate. They put up a lot to make themselves acceptable to their hosts. As long as they kept their places, they found that they were welcomed by the owners as employees, even though they were scorned and disclaimed off the job. Having invested the emotional energy of wrenching themselves from their homes and traditions, having risked their lives and health in crossing hazardous lands and oceans, having spent what money they had saved or borrowed, having worked and hoped so hard, they refused to "go back where they came from." Instead they fought back. And over the generations, for most of the immigrants and their progeny, this struggle, this engagement, this fighting back took the form of working harder, of being smarter, of risking still more and it meant deriving the strength to do this from the profoundest depths of one's biography including one's social heritage.

Put in another way, the host society (A) spurns the newcomers, thus engendering their dialectical opposites, the "estranged intruders" (B), who seek to emulate American success patterns. This interaction ($\leftrightarrow$) puts the groups at variance with each other and they collide socially and culturally. The conflict goes on over generations, through murder, lynchings and physical violence diminishes rapidly and rarely is recorded beyond the third generation. Each of us, knowing the history of our own ethnic group is able to present those data that detail the conflict our group has experienced. No immigrant collectivity in the United States is without such a history.

Viewed dialectically these histories reveal that out of the heat of the conflict the important outcome is a new fusion. Following the

"impact-integration" theory we may symbolize the dynamics of this process as: A⟷B=ab. In time, both the native residents and the newcomers are changed. The collision of the two groups impacts one into the other so totally that they become integrated. The dialectical integration of native resident and newcomer (A and B) is of the form "ab", which is to say that a synthesis occurs which unites but does not homogenize the two groups.

The newcomers having become integrated with the native residents now become themselves members of the host society (A) that greets some new wave of immigrants (B). One might expect the transformed host society, with such fresh memories of the sting of discrimination, to change the process of reception. The newly initiated native residents might be expected to opt for different alternatives when confronted by a large influx of newcomers, choosing perhaps <u>acceptance</u> or at least <u>indifference</u> rather than continuing the tradition of <u>rejection</u>. If the problem were one of culture conflict, opposing values and incompatible customs and manners, modification of the kinesthetic and verbal behavior of the native residents toward greater empathy with the newcomers might have been effected. A variety of motives might foster this change. But, as we have said earlier in the paper, the problem is one that involves not primarily a conflict of culture but rather a conflict of interests.

The former newcomers recently integrated are now on the path of upward mobility. They have learned the success oriented behavior modes and have become adept at practicing them. They derive strength from professional and craft associations, they have become organized, and they are growing aware of their rights. In the midst of this, a new wave of immigrants arrive. When these newest arrivals were willing to take jobs no one else wanted there was little problem. When they

competed for wanted jobs, they became an economic threat. "Status anxiety" and the reality of this economic threat turns the former newcomers against the new newcomers, and the process goes on. Imperceptibly the pecking order remains; the earlier arrivals close access to the higher levels of power and wealth off from those who came after.

In time, of course, some do "move up." As the group moves up off the level of destitution, individuals within the group range up and down the scale. In the meantime, an acculturation takes place that socializes the progeny of the immigrants to the more permanent aspects of the United States class system. To maintain this system, the power elite encourages status anxiety and conflict between the newly integrated and the newcomers, between the earlier arrivals and the later. Regulated tokenism, prudent cooptation, and the encouragement of racial and ethnic conflict constitute the etiological base of institutional racism, and together with that institutionalized racism, they function to maintain the American class system. The primacy of economic over all other interests and the use of racism to maintain the powerful has existed in this land since colonial times and was probably first institutionalized in the Slave laws of the 1660's.

In spite of the class differences, we are united as a people. That is to say, through the process of ethnic dynamics beginning with 1. interaction, including

a) territorial defensiveness,
b) engendering a dialectical opposite,
c) conflict and impacting,

and 2. synthesis and integration, we evolve as a new ethnic society ($A \leftrightarrow B = ab$), the people of the United States. Fused together, we retain our diversity; we are a monocultural, multi-ethnic people living in a cultural democracy. Heterogeneity is our right; and in these times we have come to demand these rights.

VI.

This last point brings us back to the original point of the paper and perhaps the major theme of the conference. What we are experiencing in the suburbs of Long Island is a special form of extension of the megalopolis. Formerly rural farm lands, the suburbs grew out of an eastward migration of city folk from Manhattan and Brooklyn to Queens, and from Queens to Nassau County and from Nassau County to Suffolk County which had been originally settled by New Englanders from Connecticut and Rohode Island. City social formations and structures were developed here, but their style, the manner in which they function, is strongly influenced by their suburban ecology.

In the case of neighborhoods, for example, the question of whether city neighborhoods fostered them is irrelevant. "Bonding" exists wherever communities exist, and both ethnicity and neighborhoods are forms of bonding. When neighborhoods are coterminus with the residence of sizeable immigrant collectivities, the immigrant community develops and the immigrant ethnicity flowers. Primary, gemeinschaft, relationships between both local residents and highly mobile, more distant former residents or family members, are enhanced.

Initially, suburbs seemed to restrict such bonding to next door neighbors, irrespective of religious, ethnic, educational, occupational or social class backgrounds. The suburbs were thought to be the great equalizers and homogenizers. Instead, for the reasons outlined above, and because of the profound attachment of ethnic heritage to ones basic personality, suburbanites have reintroduced social class bonding into their lives. They have done so with a difference, however, namely that, while initially the new suburban populations were very

mixed, very early on a voluntary system of segregation based on preference and essentially devoid of exclusionary policies was developed. Dr. Cavaioli's demographic data point clearly to the continued growth of these characteristics.

Suburban neighborhoods differ from city neighborhoods in other characteristics as well. Most obviously, there is far more physical space between people, homes, and centers of interaction. As a result bussing to schools and driving to large sprawling shopping centers, churches, temples, moving picture theatres and bars has replaced walking locally to these institutions. The fire house and the ethnic and service associations replaced the street corners as the central locations for meeting and organizing. As a result, voluntary organizations such as the fire departments, ambulance corps, Lions, Rotary, K.of C. etc., having special functions and operating in special ways, are all part of everyone's life to some degree or other from full participation to occasional donation or attendance at a parade or social function. This kind of bonding is traditional in the small towns of the United States. What makes it significantly different in the suburban regions is that it is accompanied by, what was, formerly thought to be an urban characteristic, namely ethnic diversity, a diversity that seems to have little chance of diminishing for a long time when one looks at the rise in membership in ethnic associations particularly among third and fourth generation progeny of immigrants.

Finally, and in closing, while suburban politics is now as ethnically sensitive as city politics ever were, those who see such sensitivity as necessarily divisive are wrong. Ethnocentrism, the overvaluing of ones own ethnic group and the simultaneous devaluing of all other ethnic groups is not really a function of culture conflict,

as we have said, and need not exist. Rather, using the model of ones own family, one does not need to denigrate others in order to respect ones own family. Similarly, respect for ones own ethnic heritage need **not** necessarily imply excessive chauvanism or ethnocentrism. On the contrary, it may very well engender personal models on which to base respect for other ethnic groups. Suburban ethnicity, that is ethnicity that includes middle and upper middle classes has the ability to do this, and may set the model for a more enlightened understanding of American Culture.